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ABSTRACT

In this speech, the author describes how one school developed discipline guidelines with the cooperation of staff, parents, and students. Due process procedures, types of discipline, and an alternative out-of-school program for adjustment students (those who have experienced chronic or serious disciplinary problems in the school) are described. (KF)

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STUDENT DISCIPLINARY CODES -- WHAT MAKES THEM TICK.

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INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1971, the administration at Princeton High School developed a statement of student rights and responsibilities. This statement covered the traditional areas where there were concerns and particularly emphasized the due process procedures for students in the high school. It was the feeling of the administrative staff that this general statement, which was quite lengthy, would answer many of the problems which had arisen as a result of merging with a new school district and the many changes in the expectations of students and parents in our own community. In the fall of 1971, it soon became apparent that the statement of student rights and responsibilities was not the vehicle required to do the job. The statement was broad in scope and covered many areas of concern, but apparently did not speak explicitly enough to rules nor to actions which would be taken in response to violations of school rules. There also was heard an increasing clamor of double standards, community pressure groups concerned primarily with racial matters, and dissatisfaction of many students with the so-called "Code of Reasonability" which was enforced at the discretion of the local grade level administrator.

As a result of these increasing concerns plus increasing racial incidents in the building, it became a necessity that something more explicit be given to students to help them make decisions about what the school expected of them in terms of behavior. To this end, the statement of student rights and responsibilities was revised into the Disciplinary Guidelines for students at Princeton High School.

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The important areas on the original statement were kept but the rule was explicitly spelled out with actions to be taken if the student violated the rule. In many cases, actions were spelled out for second and third violations.

This revision was well accepted because of the involvement that had originally gone into the first statement of student rights and responsibilities. The first draft was presented to the staff, parents, various parent groups, and to the students. We made in total, over about a 3-months period, four drafts before we finally came up with our final disciplinary guidelines. At the same time, we started at the end of October implementing the first draft. This may seem like a difficult way to initiate a new policy, but it was probably the very best method under the circumstances that we could have used. It might be a method that other districts would like to consider. The original document was well thought out, and parents, staff and students were involved in its development. A fourth and final draft came out in the early spring and proved to be successful because it spoke very specifically to expectations of the school and what actions would be taken with violators of the rules. In some cases, as in the case of all-day truancy, the first, second, and third violation actions were enumerated. This was done with every rule including smoking, fighting, insubordination and the use of profanity. At the same time, we pointed out very clearly at the beginning of the statement that these guidelines were flexible enough that under special circumstances, we could alter them to meet the situation. We requested only that the assistant principal involved notify the principal and the parents of both parties involved of any changes that are different from the guidelines. Our code contained the following items when it was completed:

1. A statement of philosophy noting clearly the due process procedures used in the school. This due process procedure contained a provision whereby an appeal on disciplinary decisions that had to be taken in the school could be made to an independent committee of citizens, teachers, and students. This Disciplinary Review Board provided a student and his parents the choice of either going to the Central Office to the Assistant Superintendent in charge of Personnel, or taking the problem to a citizens review board. The administrators on the Board are ex officio, have no voting privileges, and serve as resources to present background on the problem. A great deal of legal aid was sought in developing our guidelines. We used our school attorney to read over the procedures so that he had an understanding of what we were about and was able to tell us if we were proceeding in a legal manner. I would recommend this fully. At the same time, I would point out to schools involved in this/that procedure we have found one of the ingredients in dealing with problems today is the school attorney and his approach to legal sitations. In our case, the attorney proved to be extremely helpful and assisted us in working out a number of issues including due process. In some cases, school attornies have seriously hurt high school principals and other administrators who were trying to put specific procedures in writing.

We set up some new kinds of student personnel programs to assist us in our student guidelines. One was an in-school suspension center. The center was focused on the use of an unscheduled classroom and the use of a paraprofessional to operate it (under the supervision of an administrator) Students assigned there have opportunity to make up

work missed and assignments are collected by the supervisor in charge of the in-school suspension center from the classroom teachers. There was no double jeop rdy for students assigned here (missing homework and absence from school).

Strict rules were involved in the operation of the center. Students assigned were required to maintain a study atmosphere. They also were requested to follow specific rules in terms of lunch. They had to bring their own lunch in most cases, but we let them get beverages and snack items from the cafeteria. In some cases, we realized that out-of-school suspension would be needed; for example, in situations where hot tempers as a result of a fight required cool-off time away from school. We felt that there would always be this kind of situation; therefore, we did keep the out-of-school suspension where no makeup privileges are allowed. The in-school suspension center has been one of the outstanding programs we developed. Students respect it, and it has cut down on many kinds of disciplinary problems in the school. No longer do students look forward to having a vacation with no supervision at home, and they also see no complaint in terms of makeup privileges.

We also developed a special alternative out-of-school program for adjustment students. This special program is housed in an unused elementary school in the district and provides program instruction and a tutorial program for adjustment students. Adjustment students in this case are defined as students who have experienced chronic or serious disciplinary problems in the school. The operation of this special out-of-school program is designed to be rehabilitative in function. Also, in this school we provide a special program for pregnant teens which is partially funded by the state. Students sent

to this program are sent under contract so that they understand when and under what conditions their case will be up for review for return to the main building.

Rules in the alternative school are less restrictive than they are in the main building as the attendance is usually under 100 students. A more personal and more individualized program is maintained in this situation. This alternative program has been excellent because it not only has provided an opportunity for students who otherwise might have been expelled, but it has also served as a source for some alienated students who find the high school today excessively restricting.

We also offer an extensive evening program of high school credit courses for students who are dropouts and decide they wish to return to school. In both situations, students earn credits for a regular Princeton diploma. To speak of these programs as being the only effective means of dealing with changes in our school population and changes with society in general would be remiss. We developed a number of other programs which have contributed to a good atmosphere in the school and developed a real desire on the part of most students to attend school regularly. Among these particular actions we developed the pentamester program with courses varying in length from one quarter (so called "mini" courses) to courses of one semester to the more traditional full year courses. We offer 265 different courses.

We developed an extensive non-graded program. In some cases, prerequisite courses are needed, but no longer if arbitrary grade or ability placement a key to these courses. We also removed the traditional grouping pattern; we developed courses that were designed

along interest areas, vocational goals and post high school educational goals. Students who have specific kinds of interests find themselves together in the same courses. For example, students interested in going to college and who wish to perfect writing skills would often find themselves in a series of courses devoted to college grammar, literature, creative writing, etc. Students whose interests did not include post high school educational goals could select courses concerned with developing more basic writing skills and courses focusing more on interest areas. Programs in all curricula focused more and more attention to current social issues, which rate high with students. Courses in the social studies were concerned with the role of the American woman, anthropology, Afro-American History, sociology, psychology, and other experiences related to modern society. In English, there are courses such as Dialogues, Social Criticism, Harlem Renaissance, Science Fiction, African Literature, and a number of other courses, again aimed at meeting the special needs of students.

At the same time, we developed an extensive athletics progtam with great emphasis on girls' athletics. This emphasis on girls' athletics permitted much wider involvement of girls in very satisfying kinds of activities. We also developed special programs in home economics and liberal arts for co-ed classes which appealed to many students. We also made many necessary adjustments in the student activity program. We made changes in Homecoming and in our Student Council organization to make it truly representative. We dropped many of the harassments which used to exist in such areas as student hall passes and other restrictive rules about the building. We

attempted to develop a more responsive role for administrators and for parents in the building. For example, we have continued to meet every two or three weeks with ad hoc groups of parents to discuss their concerns about the school. We have attempted to recognize important ethnic contributions as well as racial contributions. And lastly, and perhaps most importantly, we went to a student selection scheduling system based on the so-called "arena" scheduling method. Students picking their own teachers and building their own schedules proved to be a great help in developing the kind of rapport and relationship that is so essential between teachers and students. Our counseling staff indicated the first year this program showed about a 70% reduction in the interpersonal kinds of conflict that existed previously between students and staff members. Although the Hawthorne Effect may have something to do say about this high estimate, there is no doubt that both students and staff are enthusiastic about this type of scheduling. And the only negative result would be viewed by a small number of teachers whose popularity seems to drop due to circumstances in their own teaching methods or expectations which became much more obvious as they did a little self-examination. In most of these cases, some in-service work and some self examination proved to correct the kinds of problems which existed.

In summary, it is important to point out that communication bringing the community along with the school in the development of the disciplinary guidelines is extremely important. Developing the guidelines in isolation within the school community, we believe, only leads to serious problems. Secondly, the cooperation of an enlightened legal authority is essential in making this kind of procedure really effective and positive. Thirdly,

approaching the guidelines as we have done (a series of working drafts) may prove a successful means of implementation. An important aspect of this is letting people know that you will change the disciplinary guidelines as conditions warrant. For example, we have changed our procedure on narcotics and on fighting to meet the special circumstances that each situation seemed to warrant. Fights initiated by students with premeditated planning with the intent to harm someone else seemed to us to require some special handling. Fourth, it is extremely important that the parents be made aware of what the guidelines and expectations are. We sent a set of our guidelines to every home in the community and each summer we send home a Summer Bulletin which contains a copy of the revised guidelines. This is essential if this procedure is to be a success. An orientation program also should be available for students who are using the guidelines. This orientation program would focus on those students new to the schools, transfers as well as the newest class in, but it wouldn't hurt occasionally to serve as reminders to the other students as well. These are all important points, we believe, in developing a set of student guidelines. In our experience we feel it is extremely important role and a very necessary one and particularly if you are residing in integrated community and the school population is integrated, then the matter may become almost an absolute requirement.